

‘America’s Army’ game tops 4-million registered user mark

Simulation finds many uses, from recruiting to training

By Kelli R. Petermeyer
Army News Service

WASHINGTON — After two years, the official U.S. Army game has registered more than 4 million users and is now one of the top five games in the world.

The creative minds behind “America’s Army” said they take every opportunity to explore ways to improve the realism of the game to keep up with its growing popularity, including the Serious Games Summit held in the nation’s capital Oct. 18-19.

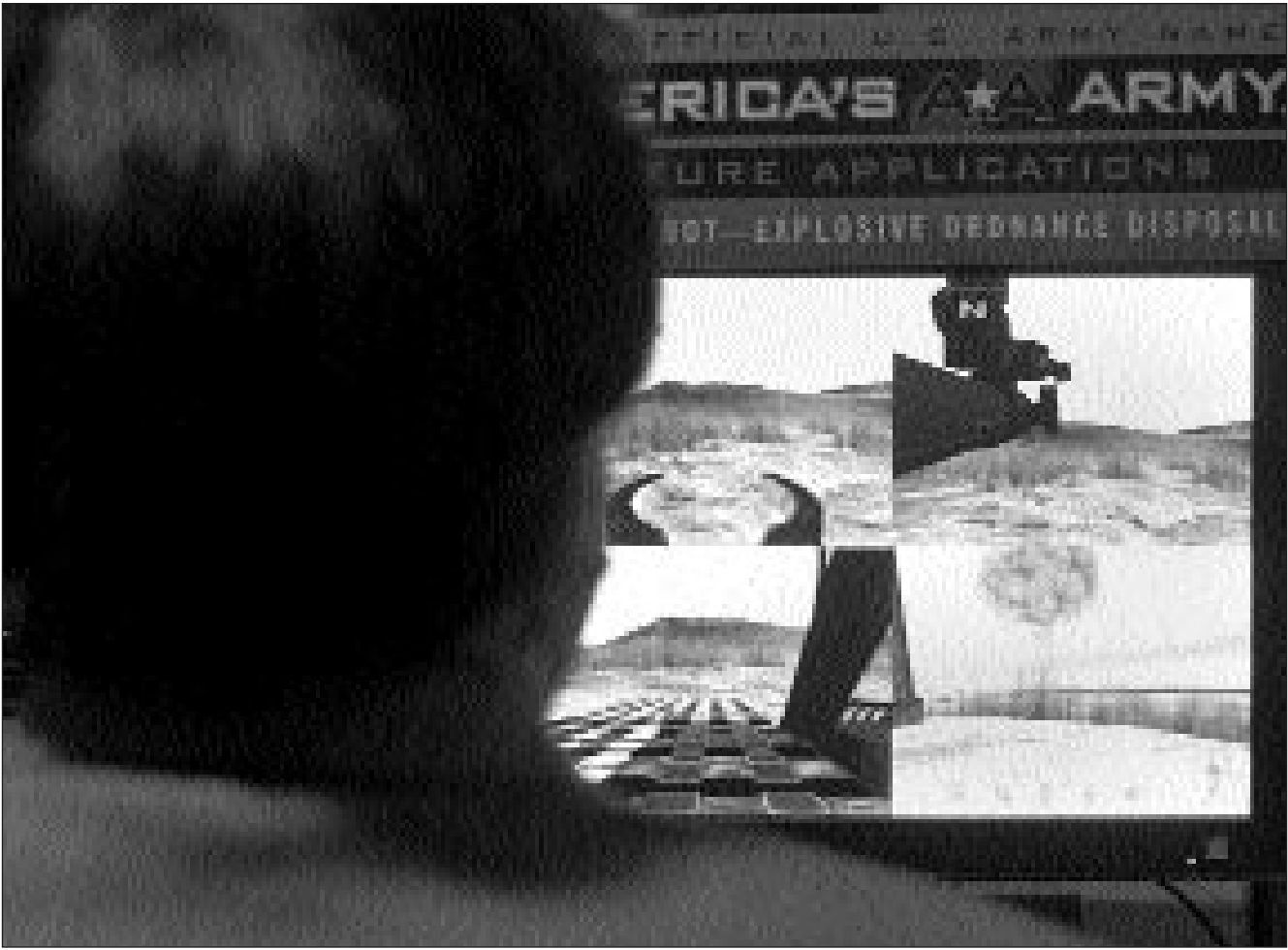
The summit gave the Army game developers, based out of the Office of Economic Manpower Analysis at the United States Military Academy, an opportunity to meet with other game developers and showcase the Army program.

The number of serious games being developed has been increasing rapidly in recent years, according to the Serious Games Summit Web site. These interactive games go beyond the traditional video game, and include applications focused on training, education, visualization, health and therapy.

“America’s Army is a communications tool which is designed for free download on the Internet, and it’s a tool that kids can use to try out being a Soldier — virtually,” said Col. Casey Wardynski, director of the OEMA, project director of America’s Army and associate professor of economics at the USMA.

The game allows people to take a look inside the Army and see what it’s like to be a Soldier, Wardynski said. They can go through basic training and airborne school, experience how a Soldier succeeds and even see what happens when a Soldier gets in trouble.

America’s Army is designed to be



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Dr. Mark Sabol, research psychologist, Army Research Institute, operates the America's Army Talon Robot to dispose of a virtual improvised explosive device.

realistic, so people can see the life of a Soldier and decide whether it is something they would like to pursue in real life, Wardynski said.

The game has generated interest in the Army and has taught people about soldiering, he said. In a survey given to 16- to 21-year olds, 29 percent said America’s Army was the most effective method of generating interest compared to other Army sponsorships.

The game’s realism teaches users a variety of skills

“I learned visual awareness and how quick my mind was,” said Cathy Fuller, a first-time America’s Army user from League City, Texas. “I want to do it again because I know I can do better.”

Fuller said the game is realistic and requires concentration.

The game also teaches Army values, Wardynski said. Real Soldiers preview

every part of the game, and if they aren’t proud of it, it doesn’t get released.

“The game is about being a Soldier, and being a Soldier is a value-laden experience,” Wardynski said. “We make a big deal out of Army values for a reason. The war on terror makes it all too apparent why those Army values are critical.”

This year, the Army is adding a new

concept to the Army game that is tied to the delayed entry program, Wardynski said. The Future Soldiers System will use concepts from basic training and put them into the virtual experience, so recruits can learn about rules of engagement, laws of land warfare and first aid before ever stepping foot on the training installation.

“So a random sample of kids at recruiting stations will be put into (the Future Soldiers System), and then we’ll be able to see how they do when they get in the Army with the idea that we’re getting them ready to get ready, so they’ll show up more prepared and more confident,” he said.

America’s Army is also being developed as a training device for Soldiers.

Some government applications, not available to the general public, are a fundamental way to provide the hands-on skills to Soldiers in a realistic fashion, said Bill Davis, executive producer, America’s Army future applications.

These applications include the Stryker Infantry Carrier Vehicle and the Talon Robot, which has been used in both Iraq and Afghanistan to destroy improvised explosive devices.

Davis said he worked with an Explosive Ordnance Detachment sergeant who had no interest in using a game — until he agreed to try it and realized it was a great training tool.

“When I sold it to the Soldier, that told me it was real,” Davis said.

Other applications are being developed constantly at the America’s Army future applications site in Picatinny, N.J.

“We replicated the function of the XM-25 Air Burst Assault Weapon and put it on the screen for training,” Davis said.

America’s Army was launched July 4, 2002, and the public version is free for download at www.americasarmy.com. Soldiers can register to have the Army star next to their virtual persona so others playing the game know they are playing with a real Soldier, Wardynski said.

Annual holiday bazaar to feature handmade crafts, door prizes, silent auction

By Barbara L. Sellers
Northwest Guardian

What do homemade crafts, raffles for door prizes and silent auctions have in common?

They will all be part of the Officer Spouses’ Club’s main fund-raiser of the year — the annual Holiday Bazaar Nov. 6, from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m., and Nov. 7, noon to 5 p.m., at Jensen Gym.

“Last year’s bazaar raised about \$12,000 which was given to 26 recipients,” said Heather Seitz, publicity chairperson, OSC. “We have a welfare committee and we

meet in the spring to award the proceeds (to the groups they select).”

The money comes from booth rental fees, entry fees from people attending, raffle tickets and a silent auction, she said.

“We have 91 spaces for crafters and eight for direct sale vendors,” said Sonya Beaty, co-chairperson for the bazaar. “Most of the spaces have already been filled. Only a few spaces remain available.”

Additionally, Family Readiness Groups will have about 15 food booths, so there will be plenty of food and drinks available, she said.

“We were mainly looking for hand-made

crafters for this year’s bazaar,” Seitz said. “We will have about 50 new crafters, as well as many favorite returning vendors.”

New craft items holiday shoppers will find this year will include table cloths and linens and two-foot fiberglass yellow ribbons that people can put in their yards.

Traditionally popular items will include homemade children’s dresses and hats, military coin holders and award boxes, amethyst jewelry, decorative candles and a large variety of unique Christmas decorations.

“Most of the vendors donate a door prize that gets auctioned off as well,” Beaty

said. “Every 15 minutes, we have a raffle drawing for a door prize.”

A hand-made quilt, which was made this year by Becky Flaherty, has always been one of the most popular raffle prizes, Seitz said.

“Putting the event together involves an incredible amount of organization and coordination with everyone involved,” she said.

Organizations supporting the event include the Directorate of Community Activities, the Directorate of Public Works, the military police, the Fort Lewis Fire Department, and Morale, Welfare and

Recreation.

“We have more than 100 OSC volunteers, but we can always use more,” Seitz said. “We will need volunteers to help with admission, selling tickets, hospitality for the vendors (such as bringing them drinks and food so they won’t have to leave their booths unattended) and setup and cleanup.”

“We start setting up about 6 a.m., and it takes pretty much all day the Friday before,” Beaty said.

Anyone wanting to volunteer at the OSC holiday bazaar can call Lisa Jones at 964-0965.

Triathlete

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“Just to be able to compete at that level with all these elite athletes, and you’re in there in the mix, is neat,” Grimm said. “I’m running on the same race course as these guys. It’s so awesome. You can cheer on your favorite athlete as they run by.”

This was not the path Grimm originally planned to travel. In her youth, she was a budding equestrienne. Later, as a psychology major at Siena College, she was drawn to the martial arts.

“My whole family has always been active,” Grimm said. “It’s not necessarily that we were the most competitive. We just really enjoyed doing things outdoors. When I joined the Army, it was a little tough to travel with the horse.”

“It’s a lifestyle for me. It’s a sacrifice, but it’s something I really enjoy doing. With today’s Army and the stresses that we all are under, I really need an outlet. And it’s a healthy outlet.”

Maj. Heidi Grimm

When she was stationed in Germany, Grimm began to take part in volks-marches, or non-competitive walks. Then she transferred to Washington, D.C., in 1995, and the walks became runs. She also began to pedal her bike to get around the traffic there.

“It took me less time to commute to work by bike than for me to drive,” said

Grimm, who became a more serious cyclist while pursuing her master’s degree in physical education at the University of Georgia at Athens.

“Eventually, I met up with a triathlon group and a cycling group down there,” Grimm recalled. “I was last every time, generally the only woman there. After a year, I was just so much better and so much more confident.”

By the time she reached U.S. Military Academy as a physical education instructor, Grimm had already become a competitive triathlete at shorter distances. At West Point, she found a coach who helped hone her swimming.

“That was certainly a struggle, because swimming is very technical,” Grimm said. “You can’t fight water. You can’t muscle your way through water.”

In 2000 Grimm applied and was chosen for the Army Triathlon Team. At

the Armed Forces competition at Fort Eustis in June of that year, she won the women’s division.

“I was an unknown person at the time,” Grimm said. “I had a good race, and I was able to win.”

Since then, Grimm has been a member of the Army team, as well as the Armed Forces team that competes internationally. But those races are done at the shorter Olympic distance, and Grimm was itching to try an Ironman. She did her first one at Lake Placid in 2000 and has now finished seven — including three in Hawaii, her favorite, in 2001, 2003 and 2004. She missed the 2002 race because she was in Korea.

“It’s just overwhelming,” said Grimm of the Hawaii Ironman. “It’s the world championship. It’s like going to the land of the gods, because everybody is so fit. It was just so intimidating.”

Almost as intimidating as the training schedule that Grimm squeezes around her busy days at the 700th PMC to remain a top triathlete.

“It is absolutely tough. I don’t do anything else,” said Grimm, who rises at 4:30 a.m. and works out. “I’m in the office by 9. Sometimes I have to go and do a second workout in the evenings.

“It’s a lifestyle for me. It’s a sacrifice, but it’s something I really enjoy doing. With today’s Army and the stresses that we all are under, I really need an outlet. And it’s a healthy outlet.”

But Grimm knows that her responsibilities at Fort Lewis must come before any athletic competition.

“Mission is just too critical,” Grimm said. “If it works out, and the mission will allow me to do it and the command can support it, then I’ll go and (race).”

“This,” said Grimm, tugging on the collar of her BDUs, “has to come first.”



Staff Sgt. Rose Ryon

The Precision Boot Drill Team performs its routine as part of the Army Field Band concert in Nashville last week.

Band

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“Traveling is not a glamorous lifestyle. It’s extremely hard to be away from your families, but we thoroughly enjoy these kiddie shows,” Enokian said, referring to the special shows the performers offer students along their tour routes.

The performing arts center, which sponsored a separately scheduled band stop the previous evening, asked the coordinating team from the field band about the possibility of performing for a group of students.

“We decided that, for the opportunity to play for these students, it was worthwhile,” said Sgt. Maj. Mike McGhee, noncommissioned officer in charge of operations for the band and chorus.

Col. Finley R. Hamilton, commander and conductor of the Field Band and Soldiers’ Chorus, said the show opens up many horizons for the children.

“We’re just trying to plant a seed

that the Army’s a nice place to be, a nice place to work, and it’s full of nice people,” Hamilton said, adding that two shows in one day puts some extra pressure on the performers.

“But hopefully they’ll have enough recovery time — on the bus, in the afternoon — to do a good show tonight,” he said, while the Soldiers finished the equipment breakdown following the Nashville show.

And what a breakdown it is, according to McGhee.

“There’s almost 18,000 pounds of gear that just left here, that will come off a tractor trailer tonight and get loaded in,” McGhee said.

“And the musicians do all that. It’s not like we have a separate crew that does all

that,” he said.

The U.S. Army Field Band and Soldiers Chorus continue their fall tour and invite the public to join them at their concerts, which are all free of charge.

For more information about the U.S. Army Field Band or the group’s fall tour, visit the musical ambassadors of the Army online at www.army.mil/fieldband.